

GORE GAZETTE

FREE Your Bi-Weekly Guide To Horror, Exploitation And Gore In The N.Y. Metro Area No. 23



AN ANGRY YOUNG WEREWOLF DEMONSTRATES HIS AL CAPONE IMITATION IN AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON, THE LONG-AWAITED EFFORT FROM JOHN LANDIS.

AMERICAN WEREWOLF:
LAUGHS FROM BLOODSPURTING

1981 will definitely be known as the "Year Of The Werewolf" among followers of horror films. Back in March, Joe Dante's The Howling kicked off the cycle, setting extremely high standards for all successive lycanthrope sagas by virtue of its overall slickness and technical expertise. Michael Wadleigh's Wolfsen came next, and although technically up to snuff, it suffered from being lumped into the werewolf film category when it truly didn't belong there. (See G.G. #21 for the complete story.) Although not yet in release in this area, Larry Cohen's (It's Alive, God Told Me To) Full Moon High has been playing in the mid-west and deep south since early July to generally unfavorable reviews, as it attempts to blend horror with humor, two elements which have always maintained a tenuous alliance at best. But the latest entry in the fur and fang sweepstakes comes from John Landis, whose An American Werewolf In London provides a well-crafted mix of laughs and shocks and is probably the first entirely successful gore comedy film ever released. Landis had the idea for Werewolf since way back in 1969, but he couldn't secure any backers interested in financing a film that elicited laughs

from throat slashings and decapitations. Instead, he worked his way up in the directorial world slowly, starting with the little-seen horror film Schlock back in 1971, through Kentucky Fried Movie in 1976, until he finally struck pay dirt in 1978 with the tremendously successful Animal House, gaining him immediate entrance into the highly elite "whiz kid" circle of youthful directors (ala Carpenter, De Palma, Dante, etc.) and enabling him to write his own ticket for whatever kind of film he wanted to do in the future. Of course, this whirlwind success went to Landis' head at first, and he pumped \$33 million dollars into The Blues Brothers, an over-rated, over-budgeted travesty that shows exactly what can happen when you let a young brat go carte blanche with a film budget. However, with Werewolf John gets back into the realistic budget realm (\$10 million) and comes up with a very simple, yet highly entertaining film. The plot is straightforward: young David Kessler (played by David Naughton, instantly recognizable as the actor in current Dr. Pepper commercials) and his friend are backpacking through England when they are attacked on a desolate moor by a werewolf. His friend is mangled to death, but David sustains only a few lacerations—enough, however, to transform him into a werewolf at the advent of the next full moon. A pretty young nurse falls in love with him and tries to suppress his guilt feelings about the unbelievable transformations, until eventually he is cornered in Piccadilly Circus by police and gunned down in full fur. I realize this doesn't sound terribly original, but Landis packs enough sick humor and realistic gore into the film (courtesy of the fantastic make-up effects of Rick Baker) that the trite limitations of the storyline are easily overlooked. Baker's masterful effects cannot be overemphasized—his werewolf transformation sequences are revolutionary. Unfortunately, a large part of the effects used in these scenes are similar in execution to those seen in The Howling and as such they probably do not pack quite the wallop they would have if Werewolf were to have been the first film released. (Incidentally, Rob Bottin, master of the pyrotechnics seen in The Howling was Rick Baker's protégé for several years, so both were probably integral in the development of the transformation tricks seen in each film. Hopefully, this will stop the controversy over who stole from whom once and for all!) Aside from the wolf effects, Baker provides enough graphic stabbings, slashings, mutilations and devourings (see WOLF over)

THE REVENGE OF CHESTER WISKOWSKI

G.G. subscriber Chester Wiskowski of Maspeth, NY is rapidly becoming the ardent archivist for the publication. Since subscribing several months ago, he has kept in close touch, providing encouraging correspondence, corrective criticism, and interesting addendums to material published in the G.G. Gore completists may find much of this information to be of interest, so the following are a few examples of discoveries and errors unearthed by Chester: Savage Man, Savage Beast (surprisingly still in release at the Liberty Theater, playing daily to packed houses of drooling animal mutilation enthusiasts) was not a Mexican documentary as inaccurately reported in G.G. #20, but an Italian effort (it figures). Also, the print being shown now in NYC is the one which was initially threatened with an X rating by the MPAA, necessitating several gore cuts on prints in release in other parts of the country to secure a more desirable R rating... The Psychopath, that lurid little curio reviewed back in G.G. #17, was first released by a fledgling west coast distributor called Brentwood Films under the title An Eye For An Eye (not to be confused with the current Chuck Norris dud) with a running time of 86 minutes. With its present length at barely over an hour, the film would be obviously being cheated of about 25 minutes of inspired acting by our favorite mutant, Mr. Tom Basham, the slickest of all cookies who just has to be seen to be believed... Another title change is that of I Spit On Your Grave, reviewed in G.G. #18 and, judging from the voluminous amount of "fan" mail received, the current contender for G.G. readers "Film Of The Year" award. It seems that old Jerry Gross (Blood Beach, I Drink Your Blood) initially released Spit early in 1980 to the rural drive-in circuit under the title Day Of The Woman. When it elicited only a tepid response from sadomasochists everywhere, Gross yanked it from release, concocted a new, more exploitative title (which he stole, incidentally, from an old 1964 French import film of the same name) and sleazeball ad campaign to match. The film's success story and accompanying notoriety is history... Finally, Chester and I disagree on an item - he felt that Jess Franco's Barbed Wire Dolls (reviewed in G.G. #20) was a German production, not an Italian one as reported by me. I researched his claim and still maintain that Dolls was Italian, and although it may have been an Italian/German co-production, linguistic merchants definitely had a hand in this skid-row favorite. Does anyone out there know (or care) about Dolls so that this raging controversy can be settled?... I'd appreciate reader feedback from columns like this (is it a waste of space, too trivial, tells you more than you want to know, etc.). Personally, I enjoy learning of the behind-the-scenes deeds of the low-budget film moguls, but I'd never want the G.G. being

tagged as the Cinefantastique of rag sheets, so please let me know how you feel about granting future space for back issue tintypes in upcoming G.G.s.

WOLF (continued)

that gore fans will find ample product to keep them fully repulsed throughout much of the film. Some may deem the humor a bit repellant (i.e., David's dead friend continually appears to him in varying stages of decomposition and expounds at length about how much he misses having sex; murders that take place in a porno theater go unnoticed by the audience who mistake the slayings for erotic groans, etc.), but all should find An American Werewolf In London to be an original, off-the-wall flick that will keep many wondering whether they should laugh or puke for the 90 minute running time of the film.

CRUD FROM CRAVEN

As briefly mentioned last issue, Wes Craven's Deadly Blessing is a resounding failure. The director of such classics as The Hills Have Eyes and the awe-inspiring Last House On The Left has seemingly contracted a case of Toxoplasmosis, letting a bigger budget and major company support cause him to abandon his exploitation/sleaze roots, resulting in the dullist, most cliché-ridden and predictable film I've seen in a long time. Blessing is nearly goreless and virtually without any redeeming quality whatsoever. The acting is terrible (Ernest Borgnine may soon give Cameron Mitchell a run for his money), the plot tired, and the pacing excremental. (The twist "surprise" ending is about as subtle as a flying wallet.) I've caught Flack from the parents of younger G.G. readers for using unwarranted expletives, but there's no way around this one: Deadly Blessing just plain sucks.



WES CAJOLES YOUNG REVIEWER INTO GIVING HIS FILM A RAVE REVIEW.